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ABSTRACT

The discipline of marketing, applied to higher education, has the potential for increasing enrollments, reducing attrition, and making college services more responsive to the needs of consumers. Faced with enrollments that were below projections, Prince George's Community College devised a four-stage marketing plan that focused on service, promotion, delivery, and evaluation. The service stage included an assessment of the educational needs of the community; of prospective student markets, such as high school seniors, re-entry women, and mid-life career changers; and of currently enrolled students. The promotion stage sought to provide prospective students with adequate information about educational programs and expected outcomes from program completion. Activities included: special telephone lines for registration information, information centers in shopping malls and libraries, and contacting city mayors and county churches. Each of these activities was evaluated in terms of costs and resulting enrollments. The delivery stage was also evaluated with regard to between-term and within-term attrition--two indices which provide a potent catalyst for re-examination of the appropriateness of programs, courses, schedules, and teaching techniques. The success of the marketing process can be seen in an enrollment increase of 15 percent in student headcount and 12 percent in credit hours. (AYC)

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DATA-BASED MARKETING

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"The aim of marketing is to know and understand
the customer so well that . . . service fits him
and sells itself." Peter Drucker

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It may be more than coincidental that the emphasis upon consumerism in higher education has emerged at a time when prospective students find themselves in a buyers' market. During the expansion era of the sixties and early seventies, little public attention was directed toward the quality of information given to prospective students or the quality of services for those students as they arrived on campus. The revolving door of higher education did not greatly concern administrators since there were other students waiting in line to fill the empty spaces.

Today that tide has turned, and, in the decade ahead, colleges must face the double dilemma of declining enrollments and shrinking fiscal resources. In the scramble for students as the supply diminishes, institutions will be forced to give greater attention to the needs of consumers if they are to remain competitive.

As college enrollments begin to stabilize or decline, it is easy to become entrapped in a negative mentality which focuses on reduction in force policies, budget deficits and program reductions. The discipline of MARKETING, applied to higher education, offers a positive alternative which has the potential for increasing enrollments, reducing attrition and making college services more responsive to the needs of consumers.

THE MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

The emerging marketing orientation stresses identification of consumers' needs, the development of a systematic plan for responding to those needs and the assessment of the impact of that plan. In this context, the marketing concept is totally consistent with the philosophical commitment of the community college to be responsive to the needs of the communities which it serves.

Marketing offers more than a new set of labels for traditional management functions. It suggests not only an attitude of responsiveness but a systematic technology for ordering responses. In applying the concepts of marketing to the non-profit sector, Kotler (1975) describes the exchange relationships between a college and its various publics. Although there is no profit motive, each public's contribution of time or money to the college will be directly proportionate to its perceived return of value. Serious enrollment declines or reductions in public support may be symptomatic of the college's failure to manage these relationships effectively. Kotler argues that the critical issue is not one of whether or not to become involved in marketing, but rather, how reasoned the process should be.

The need for information about consumer needs and the impact of marketing strategies places the Office of Institutional Research in a key role in the marketing process. The effective management of college-consumer exchange relationships will require DATA-BASED MARKETING decisions.

THE MARKETING PROCESS

The following case study will illustrate one college's experience in implementing a "marketing process" and demonstrate the impact of that process on recruitment and retention of students.

Prince George's Community College, located in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., serves a county population of more than 700,000. The present enrollment of 20,000 includes 13,700 credit and 6,300 community service students, or approximately 9,000 full-time equivalent students.

At the conclusion of the advance registration for Spring 1977, there were indicators that the College might not meet budgeted enrollment projections. Both the previous summer sessions and fall enrollments had been somewhat below projections. In the words of the Director of Institutional Research, "The enrollment was increasing at a decreasing rate."

A Task Force with representation from all areas of the College developed a marketing plan for the College which included a four-stage marketing process: SERVICE, PROMOTION, DELIVERY and EVALUATION (Leach, 1977). The emphasis on identification of service needs and evaluation of marketing impacts created a close partnership between the Task Force and the Office of Institutional Research.

Service Stage

The service stage includes ASSESSMENT OF CONSUMER NEEDS both within the community and the college. The description of "market segments" may result in the identification of new "target markets" with unique needs for learning and support services. Any discussion of service must begin with the question, "Whose needs are to be met?" If service goals are to be rooted in educational and political realities, it will be important to consider the needs of the community as well as the needs of prospective and currently enrolled students.

Population demographics, public school enrollments and economic forecasts yield valuable indicators of COMMUNITY CONSUMER NEEDS. Community needs assessment instruments such as the IMPACT model developed by NCHEMS personnel at Boulder, Colorado, provide a systematic process for soliciting perceived needs from all segments of the service area.

Enrollment trends, changing student demographics, public school enrollments, census data and comparative enrollment indices from other community colleges provide indicators of the needs of PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS. Letters to these students, asking them about their interests and educational objectives, may yield valuable planning information. Focus group interviews with high school seniors, re-entry women, or mid-life career changers may reveal unique needs for certain market segments of prospective students.

CURRENTLY ENROLLED STUDENTS are often best able to articulate their own needs. A simple questionnaire administered as part of the registration process can yield valuable data for planning both instructional and support services. Some of the national entrance and placement tests such as the Comparative Guidance and Placement Program (CGP), developed by the Educational Testing Service, include options for local questions for students' self-reported needs. More sophisticated needs assessment instruments such as the Freshman Questionnaire, developed by Astin at U.C.L.A., and the College Student Questionnaire (CSQ), developed by Educational Testing Service, have been designed to gather data on students' attitudes and needs.

Promotion Stage

Promotion is often considered to be synonymous with marketing when in fact it is only one stage of the marketing process. In contrast to the traditional "hard sell",

greater attention should be directed toward providing students with adequate information upon which to make informed choices about educational programs and expected consumer outcomes for completion of those programs. Responses to promotional activities may provide valuable market research data on the effectiveness of current programs and on future consumer needs.

Promotional resources will be wasted if they are not tailored to the needs and interests of specific target markets. A brochure may be ineffective in attracting interest from minority students if it contains only pictures with white faces. Careful evaluation of the impact of promotional activities will be necessary to justify expenditures for advertising, home mailing, and community contacts.

Delivery Stage

Delivery is the key to an effective marketing process that is dependent upon repeat business and customer satisfaction. The best promotional efforts will be ineffective unless the college can deliver learning and support services that students want at times and locations that are convenient for them.

There are serious charges in the professional literature that the "Open Door" has become the "Revolving Door". Although there is little agreement as to what constitutes true attrition in an era when "stopping in" and "stopping out" has become an acceptable educational behavior, two specific indices are used to describe the attrition experience at Prince George's Community College.

The attrition index most clearly affecting credit hours is the number of students not returning from the previous term. This BETWEEN-TERM ATTRITION for fall-spring has

been approximately 34% for the past five years. Spring-fall attrition has been approximately 47% during the same five-year period. In actual numbers, this represents 5,400 students not returning spring-fall and 4,100 not returning fall-spring (Larkin # 77-11).

From the perspective of the students, WITHIN-TERM ATTRITION represents a more serious problem. This index, as used here, includes all unsuccessfully completed courses within an academic semester. This has been described by Larkin as the "non pass" or "inefficiency" rate. The "inefficiency" rate at Prince George's Community College represented approximately 27% of all courses attempted and had been a constant ratio for five years.

These two attrition indices provide a potent catalyst for re-examination, from a marketing perspective, the selection of programs of study, courses to be offered, the way in which offerings are packaged and presented to students including time and place, and the types of learning support systems available to students.

MARKETING RESULTS

The marketing plan at Prince George's Community College included a commitment to evaluate the impact of promotional and delivery strategies.

Promotional Strategies

Assessment components which were designed for promotional strategies included surveying by telephone to measure the effectiveness of home-mailed brochures, cross-checking the names of shopping mall and library contacts with actual enrollees, tabulating the number of telephone responses to brochures, and administering questionnaires

asking enrollees how they learned about the College. The following examples illustrate the kinds of data that were useful in evaluating the success of specific promotional strategies.

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Result</u>
Install special telephones for registration information	Brochures were mailed to all County residents with a special 24-hour telephone number for further information about registration. Telephones were staffed for approximately three weeks and 1,290 calls were received. Of those 1,290 persons who called, 122 registered for Fall Semester.
Contact all city mayors	Each mayor in the County was contacted first by letter and then by telephone. Nine evening programs were held from which 30 persons registered for Fall Semester.
Staff information centers in County shopping malls	Information Centers in County shopping malls were staffed Friday nights and all day Saturdays for 14 weekends. Over 2,000 contacts were made, of which 1,336 filled out postcards for further information. Of the 1,336, 110 persons registered for Fall Semester.

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Result</u>
Staff information centers in County libraries	A brochure entitled "Four Days in May" was distributed at four County libraries. Teams of counselors and advisers went to these libraries and made 145 contacts. Of that number, 50 persons registered for Fall Semester.
Send letters and brochures to all County churches	Letters were sent to all churches. Twenty-four churches responded with requests for programs and speakers.

Delivery Strategies

The lack of sophisticated measurement tools for assessing the effectiveness of learning and support services contributes to the difficulty of evaluating program delivery strategies. Moreover, the confounding influence of several delivery strategies on the same learning outcome makes direct cause and effect relationships difficult to measure.

As noted earlier, however, some gross indices such as "between-term" and "within-term" attrition may provide an indication of the effectiveness of delivery systems. Although the within-term attrition at Prince George's Community College did not change appreciably during the first Fall Semester, the Spring-Fall attrition dropped from 47% in 1976 to 38% in 1977 (Larkin # 78-8). This decrease resulted in 1,000 fewer students dropping out between Spring and Fall 1977 than had dropped out between the same terms the previous year. The higher Spring-Fall retention rate has now been maintained for two years.

Within-term success indices (course completed with grade of D or better) were analyzed by sex, race and three age cohorts (teens, early twenties, and over 25). Success rates were displayed by first-time and continuing student status for each academic division, department, course and section. This information summarized by departments and divisions was shared with instructional managers and faculty. (Larkin #78-37)

Although pass rates among divisions varied from 60% to 93%, the same analysis one semester later (Larkin # 79-31) reflected gains in several departments.

Impact on Enrollment

How successful has the "Marketing Process" been at Prince George's Community College? While enrollment in community colleges increased nationally only 3% for the two-year period 1975 to 1977, and enrollment had grown minimally at adjacent community colleges, Prince George's Community College experienced an increase of 15% in student headcount and 12% in credit hours between Fall Semester 1976 and 1977. The increase continued during the Spring Semester with a growth of 12% in headcount and 7% in credit hours over the previous Spring and the increase in the Summer Term was 12% in headcount and 10% in credit hours. These growth indices reflect the combined impact of additional new students and additional returning students.

This past fall community college enrollments in Maryland declined by 6%. In Prince George's County enrollment dropped at the University of Maryland by 3% and at Bowie State College by 5%. A small increase at Prince George's Community College represented a larger share of a declining market.

SUMMARY

Declining enrollments and decreasing public financial support will be the two major problems facing community colleges in the years ahead. A marketing response to these two problems places a high priority on identification of consumer's needs, implementation of promotional and delivery strategies that are responsive to those needs and the careful evaluation of the impacts of those responses. The reliance upon hard data for responsible marketing decisions will require that the Director of Institutional Research be a key member of the marketing team.

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